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from house to HOME™

San Rafael Villa Emanates

In Old World Style

Luxury Living

With Christopher Lowell

Vintage You

Create A Wine Shrine

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Uncompromising Detail

text | Paula Wrenn
images | Stuart Lirette

Before an Old World-style villa could be constructed on this acre in a desirable San Rafael neighborhood, the undistinguished 1,800-square-foot, 1960's rancher had to go. When the site was ready for construction, all that remained of the original home was the swimming pool hole. Through thoughtful design and attention to detail, the property owners now enjoy a home with the historical reference of a Mediterranean villa and all the latest conveniences.

Eugene Nahemow and David Rivera of Nahemow Rivera Group in San Francisco and Merritt Nelson Custom Builders of Rohnert Park had collaborated on previous residential projects before joining forces on this one.

Mediterranean sanctuary

Just as countryside Tuscan villas are built around small stone houses, Nahemow's vision was to initially present a small, stone house at the courtyard, with lime-washed stucco walls extending beyond. Nahemow, who also designed the exterior hardscape, crafted a Spanish-Mediterranean approach that clearly says "you are entering a sanctuary." A custom-crafted Guatemalan door is but one surprise. The humorous garden faucet fountain suggests an absent-minded gardener might soon return. The garage is around back and under the home.

The 22-foot entry hall ceiling immediately communicates enduring style with features such as extensive molding and custom, iron stair rail. Natural light as well as decorative lighting adds drama throughout. Faux walls of "worn red leather" in the powder room are bejeweled with etched-glass doors, an antique etched mirror, copper sink, and rough gemstone





light fixtures. "We construct all types of homes in these finer neighborhoods, but this one was highly detailed. Every finish and color was customized and the materials chosen were all top grade," says Gary Merritt.

An octagonal library with fireplace has views of the courtyard through arched windows. The guest suite bathroom features dual vessel sinks, double shower, steeping tub with concrete surround, and onyx tiles. This energy and sound-automated home is enabled with CAT-5 wiring, which also supports high-speed communications from the third bedroom/office.

Built with entertaining in mind

The remainder of the ground floor in this 5,200-square-foot home is the great room, a casual living room, and service areas. Lighting level controls in the living room make wide screen viewing, reading, and relaxed conversation more pleasant. The pantry and large laundry/mud room offer excellent storage and project space. State-of-the-art climate management systems include central air conditioning, quiet, radiant heating, and a back-up generator.

The 1,000-square-foot great room is designed for indoor/outdoor entertaining. Rich color and beams maintain a visual sense of scale where Volcanic Bulgarian Sophia stone flooring flows between the outdoors and great room, through the columns and arches of the covered veranda.

The kitchen features double appliances and farm sinks, as well as refrigerated wine storage. The owners cook fresh, so the solo freezer is nearby, just out of sight. Alder cabinets with antiqued glass fronts extend to the 13-foot ceiling. The cook top on the oversized island is surrounded by limestone beneath a hood of waxed Venetian plaster in an iron framework, the same plaster around the wood-burning custom pizza oven.

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The pool, with kid-safe cover, is screened from weather elements by low walls and planters. Cover and space heaters under the veranda make a glass of wine and a slice of gourmet pizza enjoyable in almost any weather.

Warm Tuscan colors, decorative lighting, and nooks for dimensional art create visual interest. Paintings and art photography hang museum-style from picture rail. An intriguing staircase off the generous second floor landing leads to a lookout tower, perfect for meditation or yoga. The master suite occupies the entire second floor.

Segmented retreat

Comfort and tranquility in the master suite are supported by elegant design, storage, and convenience. A second laundry is included in the suite, and fully outfitted matching walk-ins are located on either side of the suite entry.

